

DAY OF PENTECOST

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Photograph by Carolyn Wheeler

READ: ACTS 2:1-21

"All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages..."

REFLECT:

This is the last of these weekly reflections from me, at least for the time being. For everything there is a season. I've been grateful for the structure they've given to my week, and the space and prompt to reflect, during a difficult and disorienting time. Most of all I've been grateful for your company along the way.

Looking back over them provides a sort of map of the year, with its emotional ups and downs. Last year's Pentecost was a time of longing for the situation described in Acts 2:1 ("they were all together in one place"), but of hope found in the Holy Spirit's talent for overcoming separation and barriers to community.

This year our situation is significantly different. Many of us have been vaccinated. Lockdown restrictions are easing. Our churches are beginning to gather, physically, once more. Summertown URC are meeting in our building for the first time this year on this Pentecost Sunday. It will still be a restricted form of worship but for those who gather it will be a joyful occasion... good to be all together in one place again at last.

And yet coming out of lockdown isn't straightforward. I suspect we're all different in how we feel about being around people again, and what we perceive to be sensible or safe. Hugs are allowed now. But horrifying scenes from India remind us that Covid has not been defeated.

The women and men who had gathered in an upstairs room in this account of the first Pentecost had lived through a great trauma together. The world outside was a dangerous place. They had endured a double bereavement; Jesus' death, and then his ascension to heaven. They were waiting in Jerusalem, as instructed by Jesus, unsure of what the future might hold.

Into this climate of hopefulness and fear, exhaustion and doubt, the Holy Spirit arrives. Not gently but with noise and colour, wind and fire. The worship somehow spills out of the building, drawing a crowd. I love the joyous messiness of this scene, the radical inclusiveness that sweeps everyone along, the cacophony of voices. And I love that it gives us a picture of unity where difference is not erased but celebrated in all its richness, the Holy Spirit bridging the spaces in between.

A PENTECOST PRAYER:

Come, Holy Spirit.
Breathe life into your Church.
Fill the spaces between us.
Help us to dream dreams, to move forwards together with energy and vision, leaving no-one behind.
May love spill over, flowing out into the streets to transform and bless the world. **Amen.**

PRAY:

- For India. Lord, have mercy. And for a global approach to tackling the virus, including fair distribution of vaccine, PPE and medical supplies. None are safe until all are safe.
- For Jerusalem, and the escalating Israel/Palestine conflict. Lord, have mercy.
- For all who are anxious, isolated or vulnerable and all who are bereaved.

RESOURCES AND CONTACTS:

Wheatley URC have a huge archive of online sermons you can listen to, and are regularly posting new resources on their website: www.wheatleyurc.org.uk

Pauline and myself, and your elders, continue to be here for you if you need someone to talk to, have a prayer request, or just fancy a chat! Please let's keep in touch. Feel free to ping us an email or give us a ring.